

After the Beat

by i am pie

Category: Hairspray

Genre: Friendship, Romance

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2007-08-08 15:29:27

Updated: 2007-09-02 16:23:16

Packaged: 2016-04-26 16:49:34

Rating: T

Chapters: 14

Words: 16,800

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Hairspray After the Miss Hairspray finale, Link realizes that even though people like Tracy are the future, there are those who still cling to the past and to segregation

1. A Sad Realization

Authors Note: Sigh, But to own Hairspray... I can dream :-). Also BTW spelling isn't my forte so i ask for forgiveness in advance

"Someday this will all be just a silly story to tell our kids. And they'll laugh at us and say 'Come on, Ma, be serious! Nothing is segregated and nothing has been in forever! Thats ancient history!' But we'll smile and we'll say 'Ok, don't believe us, but we were on a show that was segregated.' It'll be great." said Tracy with a smile. Her eyes were permentantly fixed upwards, seeing the future. Penny offered a smile and a "Mm-hm" before putting the sucker in her mouth and turning to smile at Seaweed, who squeezed her hand and smiled back.

Link was the only one amoung them not smiling. He had been, all day, since the Miss Hairspray Pagent, but he'd come down from that cloud rather suddenly. It had only been a week since that fateful coupling of nights leading up to and at the show, but since then everything had changed. Baltimore as Link Larkin knew it had changed.

He hadn't realized it, happy as a clam with Tracy. After all, what could be better? He got the girl, the good one, the agents asked him to sign after his performance at the Miss Hairspray show, and he'd made new friends: Seaweed and Penny and a conglomeration of other kids Seaweed knew. Ok, so some of his old friends shied away, but who cared? People like Tracy and her friends were who held the future.

But yesterday, on his fall from Cloud Nine, he hit his head. And it hurt.

"Well thank you, Li'l Inez. There you have it, everybody, all our new Council Kids. Don't you change the channel, folks, we'll be back with more of the newly and totally intergrated Corny Collins show, with Motormouth Maybelle"

"That's me! You stay right there and we'll jam more of your favorite R+B, brought to you by Ultra Clutch!"

"And we're off! That was great, everybody, great!"

"Psst, Link, C'mere a minute."

"Me?"

"Who else do you know named Link? C'mere!"

"What's up, Seaweed?"

"You hear about Amber?"

"Uh..."

"How she's gone from school and everything?"

"Well, yeah, Mrs. Von Tussle got fired. They left."

"That's not why they left Baltimore."

"Yeah it is. Why else?"

"Wake up, Cracker Boy! Can't you see? They left because the show got intergrated."

"No."

"Your right. That and Amber was 'making friends' with John Russells."

"Who?"

"John Russells. He's a friend of mine? They started dancing at the pagent."

_"Oh yeah? Hmm. So? Mrs. Von Tussle didn't like me all _that_ much."_

"Boy, really! John was a friend of mine. He was black!"

"..."

"Yeah. Welcome back to reality."

"No."

"And we're back on in ten, nine,"

"Places!"

"Smile pretty for the camera."

"Five, four, three,"

"No."

"Welcome back to the Corny Collins show!"

"Link."

"Link."

"Link?"

"Link!"

"Huh?"

"You spaced out!"

"Sorry, Trace." He smiled, but it was a surface smile only. He _had noticed. But he hadn't wanted to admit it. Things between Amber and he had been moving forward at a standstill. The Larkins had met Amber, thought she was nice and all, and of course Mrs. Von Tussle knew Link. But he had the feeling Amber had inherited her view of men from her mother: Link was on the same level of a teddy bear... a great accesory but not much else.

Thus, neither of them had been horribly heartbroken when it had ended. He had noticed, from up in his euphoria, that Mrs. Von Tussle was screaming on the sidelines, and Amber was dancing with a black fellow. But so what, he thought, people like Tracy are the future, they have to teach everyone else, she'd taught him, maybe Amber had learned, too.

No. He'd sat next to Tracy on the bus, in class, at lunch, so obviously he didn't see his old friends as much. He had attributed it to that. But they were avoiding him. Not all of them. More so Brad, and Mikey. Fender and IQ acknowldged him, smiled, but not much more.

Li'l Inez and the rest of the new Council got dirty looks from some people. They acted like they were used to it, but they got to dance on TV. Some people did leave, but some stayed, an whoever left got replaced, no big deal.

Big deal.

He hadn't wanted to notice. Tracy said, "They can't stop the beat. It's happening." They may not be able to stop the beat, but Lord knew they were gonna try their hardest.

2. The Invitation

Link wandered through hallways towards Tracy's locker. It was suprising, really, how many classes they had together. When they had compared schedules, they had giggled like little kids when they found they had six of their nine classes together (The Council Kids didn't have last period, they left for the show). But that wasn't what he

was thinking about. That morning's conversation was still fresh on his mind.

After getting dressed and doing his hair as usual, he walked into the kitchen for breakfast. As he scooped oatmeal into his bowl, he greeted his parents. "Morning Ma, Pops." His mother sat toast next to his plate, and with a worried air, returned the greeting.

"Good morning, dear." Link smiled at her. Mrs. Larkin was, in general, a rather nervous person. Mr. Larkin folded his paper and sat it down. He looked worried, too. Link started getting fidgety. Mr. Larkin was far from a nervous person.

"What's wrong?" asked Link, looking from parent to parent.

"Brenda, come sit down." said Mr. Larkin, eyebrows furrowed. As Mrs. Larkin sat down, he sipped his coffee and coughed.

"Is everyone ok?" Link felt his heart sink. "Oh God, Grandma Larkin died!"

"No! No, Grandma Larkin's fine, hon, it's not that!" Mrs. Larkin cried.

"Then what is it?" asked Link, shoving his bowl to the side.

"We're worried about you, son." said Mr. Larkin, staring at the confused boy.

"Why?" Link felt great. His life had never been better.

"Well, you see, dear, we love you, it's just that we saw you on TV, at the pagent, and... well, dear, what happened to Amber?"

Link supressed laughter. So that was what this was all about. He made his face serious. "We broke up. We just weren't going anywhere is all."

"Hmm... ok. So who was the girl so kissed so long at the end!?"

"Brenda, your ulcers!"

"Link, that was that Tracy Turnblad, wasn't it? I saw her on the news! Honey, do you know she savagly attacked a war vetran and eagle scout with a blunt object!?"

"Ma, Dad, no! That wasn't her...well, I mean, it was, it's just that that's not what really happened! She bumped him and she was holding a sign, that's all. Really." Ok, so he fudged the truth. His mother was nervous enough already.

Mr. Larkin patted his wife's hand. "Son, do you really think this is a good idea? You just got signed, you don't want to ruin your chances." Mr. Larkin didn't know much about dancing and singing, but he knew about ruining chances. He didn't want Link to do that.

"Dad, the agents complimented Tracy's dancing. They don't care what she did."

"Amber was so nice! You were going to sign together! I liked Amber, she was nice, I don't know this Tracy at all!"

"Brenda,"

"Ma, she's super nice, too. You'd like her." Something in Link's face must have spoke to Mr. Larkin.

"You really like this girl, don't you?"

"I'd rather dance with her than dance with a contract."

"Oh, Link!" Mrs. Larkin grabbed her stomach with one hand and her forehead with the other.

Mr. Larkin thought for a moment. "Invite her and her parents to lunch on Saturday so we can meet them, ok?"

"Yes, sir." Link glanced at the clock. "I gotta go now, or I'll be late." Link kissed his mother's cheek. He went to open the front door when Mrs. Larkin called out to him, "Link, I don't know her parents at all! I don't know her mother one bit!"

Link froze. If his mother knew that Mrs. Turnblad was the lady in the scarlet red dress who had jumped in front of the camera at the pagent, she wouldn't make it till Saturday to meet them. How could he describe her? He thought for a moment, then called out, "Ma, don't worry! She's nice, too... She makes great pork!"

Link realized he'd walked right by Tracy's locker and his first hour class. As he hurried to get to the room, he thought how to invite Tracy. As he slid into the desk beside her, he said, "Hey Trace, sorry I'm late. Doing anything this Saturday?"

"Homework and helping Ma do laundry," She rolled her eyes, "Maybe practicing dancing. You?"

"Nothing. My parents want to have you all over for lunch. Can you come?"

Tracy smiled and Link's heart melted. "Really?"

"They're really looking forward to it."

"Ok!"

"Alright everyone, settle down. Time to start class."

Link settled into his desk. He knew his parents would love Tracy. It was impossible not to.

3. Turmoil at the Station

Quick A/N: Big thanks to everyone who is reading this and to those who review!! The Larkins and Turnblads will meet, be patient! Also, I know, the Council kids ride a bus to the station, but having Link drive them home fit the scene better, so bare with me.

"And we're off!"

"That was great, everyone! Before you go change and go home, C'mere a minute." Corny called out. The council gathered around him. Link found Tracy among the crowd and grabbed her hand. She looked up and smiled at him. "Alright, Ms. Stubbs and I have been talking about the new dances, and we have the partner assignments today, just like we promised."

Maybelle held up a sheet of paper and smiled. "Listen up. After I call your names you may leave. Ok, so... Obviously our two lead dancers are together, Inez and Link, and after that we have Tracy/Joey, who are Link and Inez's backup partners when they have solos... We've got Seaweed/Brenda, Josiah/Noreen, Paul/Doreen, Bix/Kelly, Jesse/Sarah, I.Q./Naomi, Fender/Christi, and Lou Ann/Matthew. Have a nice night, y'all."

The crowd dispersed. "I'll give you a ride home after we change," said Link. Tracy smiled at him.

"You say that like one of these days you're gonna make me walk. Makes me uneasy!"

"Never," He said, smiling, and winking at her. They squeezed hands and parted ways.

After changing out of his stage clothes and checking his reflection (gorgeous, as always... his hair looked great), Link wandered through the makeup mirrors to the stage to meet Tracy. He'd never noticed it before, but when he looked up, he saw the names of those who'd left had been pried off from above the mirror, but no one had bothered to replace them yet. Instead, a paper taped to each mirror bore the (sloppily) handwritten name of that council kid. Link frowned. They must not have had time, what with all the changes to the station and all.

He smiled when he saw Tracy on the outer edge of the stage. He walked up and nudged her. "Ready?"

"Shh!" Tracy looked at him, angry. Link frowned. Tracy had never been like that before! But then a commotion on stage grabbed his attention.

"No way! No!" Joey was right up in Corny's face.

"Ms. Stubbs and I payed attention, close attention, to good chemistry."

"I got to insist I get a new partner! I can't be dancing with that...that...whale! Not when agents are watching!" A fire of anger lit up in Link when he realized that Joey was talking about his beloved Tracy. His fists clenched and unclenched at his side. Joey was in for it.

"Hey! With the exception of Inez, Tracy is the best dancer on this show! You oughta be glad we paired you up with someone who'd make you look good!"

"Yeah, that's another thing! If you expect me to touch that...
girl"

(can't write it but we know what he really meant)

"while that stupid crooner tries to act cool, you got another thing coming. It's bad enough they're even here!"

"You're on thin ice." Corny was visibly seething.

"Things were better when Mrs. Von Tussle were here. We weren't forced to dance with _them. _No wonder so many people have left already."

"Then maybe the Corny Collins Show isn't for you anymore, Joey."

"Maybe not. Good luck with ratings... People might call the repairman when disgusting black spots show up on their sets, especially the one you wrongly crowned Miss Hairspray." Joey sneered.

"Leave. Now."

"Don't have to ask me twice." Joey stormed out the door while Corny disappeared off stage into the back rooms, mumbling angrily under his breath.

"Oh, I'm going to get him." said Link, ready to chase Joey and punch him, "Tracy, don't listen to a word he says!"

Tracy looked at him. "What? Who cares? Look, Inez heard!" With that, she ran across the room.

Link watched Tracy, she was already across the room, hugging Inez, who'd heard the entire thing. As had much of the rest of the Council, he saw as he crossed over to Tracy. That sinking feeling returned, the one he had when Seaweed had told him why the Von Tussles were gone.

"People only say stupid things like that when their jealous, Inez, don't listen to him." Tracy crooned.

Link patted her back. "Inez, you and the other new kids make _us_ look like rookies, you're the experts."

Maybelle Stubbs came flying towards them, trailed by Seaweed. "Oh, Inez, honey, c'mere!"

"Mama, it's ok, I know he wasn't telling the truth. He's just ignorant." said a dumbfounded Inez into her mother's bosom.

Seaweed surveyed the scene for a moment before leaving without a word, anger seeping out of his every pore. Link watched him go.

After several minutes, and more hugs between Tracy, Inez, and Mabel, Link and Tracy left. The ride on the way to Tracy's house was quiet. Neither one of them tore away from their own thoughts. As they pulled onto Tracy's street, she spoke.

"I just don't understand some people. Inez and Seaweed rock! Why hate them and everyone else? Different is better sometimes."

Link was quiet for a moment. He parked in front of her house. "I know. But things are changing. Starting with people like you." He smiled at her. She smiled back and hugged him.

"Thank you. See you tomorrow." She climbed out of the car, and Link watched her open the door, turn, wave, and close it, like she did every day.

As Link drove away from the Hardy Har Hut, he could only think of one thing. How he didn't deserve Tracy. She was verbally attacked and insulted, yet she didn't care. She was more concerned with other people. She was so much better than he was. He had so much to learn from her.

But he had time. Hopefully, the rest of their lives.

4. The Lunch Presentation

"LINK! Get in here! NOW!" Mrs. Larkin was in the kitchen, having a small nervous breakdown about the lunch. Link didn't keep her waiting.

"Yes, Ma?"

"The Turnblads will be here any minute. Is that what you're wearing?"

Link looked down at his button up shirt and nice slacks. "Yes?"

Mrs. Larkin smoothed out her skirt. "Ok. Um..."

Mr. Larkin wandered in. "Brenda, it's going to be ok." Just then, the doorbell rang. Letting out a small squeal, Mrs. Larkin swirled and looked at Link.

"They're here! You answer the door and introduce us." Link nodded and led the way to the entrance hall. She took a deep breath and nodded.

Link opened the door to see a smiling Tracy and nervous Edna Turnblad, who was clutching a cake on a plate. "Come in, come in," said Link. They all crowded into the small hall. Link cleared his throat. "Ma, Pops, this is Tracy Turnblad, and her mother, Edna Turnblad. Tracy, Mrs. Turnblad, these are my parents, Brenda and Hugh Larkin."

Edna juggled the cake into one hand and extended the other to shake hands. "Well hello, I'm sorry about my husband, he had to work."

"Oh?"

"Yes, he owns his own joke shop. One of the best in Baltimore. Maybe you've heard of it? The Hardy Har Hut?"

"Sounds...quaint." said Mrs. Larkin with a strained smile. Mr. Larkin just smiled.

Edna held out the plate. "I made carrot cake."

Mrs. Larkin took it and smiled. "How nice of you. You didn't need to do that."

"It's only polite." During this nervous, awkward, and pointless rambling between the two mothers, Link and Tracy smiled at each other. Link tried to tell her with his eyes and smile that, all dressed up nice and modest to impress, she looked good. _Really _good. She smiled back and sent him the same message with her eyes.

Mr. Larkin watched this silent exchange with a smile. Lo and behold, to his surprise, this two kids really did like each other. Alot. He let them eye each other for a minute while his wife and Mrs. Turnblad rambled, then interrupted. "Shall we go into the dining room? Brenda has prepared a wonderful lunch."

Tracy and Link's eye-lock broke, and Mr. Larkin made sure to walk inbetween them, so he could be fun-wrecker. The dining room table already had the spread layed out. Everyone stood for a moment, staring at the table, when Mr. Larkin spoke.

"Edna, is it? Why don't you sit here? Tracy, you can sit next to her. Link, next to your mother on the other side of the table. There we go." Mr. Larkin took his seat at the head.

Mrs. Larkin shot up. "Edna, I'm so sorry, I totally forgot, here, let me take the cake." She moved it over to the buffet and took her seat again. Everyone started putting food on their plates. Link watched Mrs. Turnblad put small portions on her plate and prayed it wouldn't offend his mother.

But Link didn't need to worry. After Edna sampled everything, she went back for more. He and Tracy smiled at each other every now and then. "You have such a nice house, I must say. So big and lovely." said Edna, looking around.

Mrs. Larkin smiled at her nervously. "Thank you. We try."

"Our house is ok, I suppose, but you see, with me being a laundress, it's always chaos."

"Laundress? How... interesting."

Mr. Larkin spoke before either could be offended by each other. "So Tracy, you and Link met at the show, I suppose?"

"Yes... sort of. More so at de..." She cut the word detention off. No need to send the wrong message. "At the... school...he suggested I audition for the show."

"Really?" Mrs. Larkin chewed on her lower lip. "How nice."

Everyone finished eating in awkward silence. They sat for a moment with empty plates. "Link, help your mother clear the table for dessert."

"Yes sir." Mr. Larkin turned on his charm and complemented Edna's clothes as Link carried dishes to the kitchen behind his mother. The door swung close and Mrs. Larkin started whimpering the way she did

when she was stressed.

"Ma, lunch was great."

"Mm-hmm. Oh, dear, mmm..."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, I made this fudge delight. Should I serve it? Or her carrot cake? I don't want to offend her. But I don't want her to think I didn't think to make dessert."

"Serve both."

"Mmmm." Mrs. Larkin patted her hair. Link grabbed forks and plates and motioned for his mother to take the dessert. She took it and managed to smile.

They entered the dining room and Link sat out the eating-ware and then sat the carrot cake next to his mother's fudge delight. She and Mrs. Turnblad smiled at each other, as they took a piece of each other's dish.

Link, Tracy, and his father were stuck in a struggle. He hadn't quite realized what he'd done until just now. If Tracy took Mrs. Larkin's dish, her mother might feel abandoned, but if she took her mother's dish, then Mrs. Larkin might be offended, and visa versa for Link and Mr. Larkin.

The seconds ticked by, and the moment in which both women would be offended was very near. Luckily, Edna saved them. She spoke. "Mmm, oh, Mrs. Larkin, this must be the best fudge delight I've ever had!"

Mrs. Larkin smiled genuinely for once. Tracy, Link, and Mr. Larkin all listened. This was buying them time. "Please, call me Brenda. I use caramel sauce, that might be why. And I must say, this carrot cake is very moist."

Edna blushed. "Carrot shreds, baby food, a little milk, that's all."

"It's very good." Mrs. Larkin said. Mr. Larkin made brief eye contact with Link and seized the moment.

"Well, such high praises for both! Which should I choose? Would you ladies mind if I had a small slice of both? Mmm, good." Link and Tracy piped up, saying together things like, "Oh yes, I agree, us too,"

Things fell back into the awkward silence which was almost becoming comfortable now. Link saw that his mother and father were appraising the Turnblads, and he saw that Tracy knew this, but instead of getting nervous and putting her head down, she held her chin up, shoulders straight, smile in place. Link smiled in pride.

After the dessert plates sat empty for a moment, Mr. Larkin spoke up. "If you have time, we can have coffee in the sitting room."

"We can," said Edna, and rose with everyone else as they migrated to

the sitting room. Edna and Tracy took a seat on the couch, Mrs. Larkin across from them on the opposite couch, and Link in the chair next to where Tracy sat. They smiled encouragingly at each other.

"I'll get the coffee, if you'll wait a moment," said Mr. Larkin, excusing himself. The four remaining in the room all exchanged awkward smiles and sat in silence. The grandfather's clock in the corner ticked away, adding to the silence. Edna wrung her hands and Mrs. Larkin strummed her fingers on her arm.

"So, Tracy, you dance on show. I saw you at the Miss Teenage Hairspray Pageant. You were so... good."

"Thank you. Lots of people say I should have won, but I'm glad Inez Stubbs did. Because of it, the show is a little more, you know," Tracy was visibly getting excited, "Afrotastic!" (me here. Sorry, just had to use that word, love that she uses it in the movie_)

Edna's eyes widened, Link let out a nervous chuckle, and Mrs. Larkin probably would have choked had she had coffee in her mouth. "Well, then... Hmm, well, isn't that, hmm, yes." Tracy knew immediately she had messed up. Chewing her lower lip, she mumbled an apology, and they sunk back into the awkward silence. All of them wondered what was taking Mr. Larkin so long.

The phone rang. Edna turned to Mrs. Larkin. "Do you need to get that?"

"No, Mr. Larkin will."

"Oh. Ok." Sure enough, the phone stopped mid-ring. Everyone avoided eye contact. Link patted his knees and sighed. This lunch was not going well. At all.

Mr. Larkin stepped into the sitting room without a tray. "Edna? Your husband has called for you."

Edna pushed her entire self out of the cushy, easy-to-sink-into couch, and Link saw his mother's eyes widen as she wobbled for a moment. Link prayed Edna and Tracy hadn't saw it, but they must have missed it, because Edna simply followed Mr. Larkin to the phone.

"The meal was delicious, Mrs. Larkin," offered Tracy, trying to make amends.

"Oh, thank you, Tracy. The cook made it."

"Oh, ok." Awkward silence.

Mr. Larkin re-appeared. "Tracy, your mother wants to see you." Tracy, looking confused, pushed herself out of the couch as well and followed Mr. Larkin. This time, Mrs. Larkin controlled her eyes.

Knowing the phone was out of earshot, Mrs. Larkin spoke after a moment. "Well, they certainly are more..." she trailed off, her eyes widening. Link, disgusted, scoffed at his mother.

"Ma, is that the problem. They're _more_? Yeah, more a better person than Amber and her mother ever were."

"I was going to say more... erm, _eccentric _than the Von Tussles."

"Well, I like Tracy. It doesn't matter that she's not as well off as us, or _anything_ else. Ok? She's going to be around. Get used to it."

"Ohhhh, Link..." She rubbed her forehead. "Edna looks familiar. I just wish I knew where from."

Link cleared his throat, hoping she wouldn't remember. Things were awkward enough as was.

Suddenly, Mr. Larkin came in, followed by a nervous looking Edna and Tracy.

"I'm so sorry," said Edna.

"That's alright, we'll have coffee some other time. Honey, something came up, and the Turnblad's have to leave to go home. Link, get their coats?"

"Yes sir." Link looked at Tracy for an explanation, but couldn't get her to look at him.

He met them in the entrance hall and handed Edna her coat, and stared into Tracy's eyes.

What's wrong? he mouthed.

_Seaweed, _she answered.

Stubbs?

_Yeah. _She mouthed something else, but he missed it. It couldn't be what he thought she said.

What?

_I'll explain later. _Tracy turned and thanked Mr. and Mrs. Larkin after her mother. She turned to Link and smiled.

_Jail? _He mouthed. Tracy nodded, and with that, they left and hailed a cab. Mr. Larkin closed the door and smiled at his wife and son. "Well, that went... well, I suppose. She seems nice, son. Different, then, uh, what you... usually... go for, but... nice."

Link just nodded, totally distracted. How and why was Seaweed in jail?

Not my best work, I know, sorry... I've been busy, with school starting again and all... I'll try to update soon! Promise!

Link paced the length of his room, science homework long since abandoned. He couldn't even think about practicing dancing. Yesterday's already uncomfortable lunch had been interrupted when Edna had received a phone call that had caused them to run for the door.

He hadn't heard from Tracy since, and he was getting really nervous. He kept looking at the clock, keeping a countdown until the next day at school when he could see Tracy and maybe get an explanation. Eleven hours.

His mother had been a nervous wreck ever since last night when she realized where she'd seen Edna before. They'd just been sitting at dinner, Link poking his mashed potatoes and hoping that everyone was ok. He hated not knowing what was going on. This was just like before the pageant, only now he couldn't sneak out and over to the Turnblad residence.

Suddenly, Mrs. Larkin sat up straighter, eyes wider, mouth open. "Oh my God. She was wearing that...that...dress...with the sequins...and...and...she...Oh, God, Link, what have you got yourself into?" She clutched her forehead and excused herself from the table. Mr. Larkin sighed loudly. Link just sunk further into his chair.

There was a knock at the door. Link stopped walking and stared at the door knob. "Link?" his mother said, "Are you ok? It's getting late. Do you feel ok?"

"Fine, Ma, just... just finishing some homework."

"I can hear you walking. Are you sure you're ok?"

"Just thinking...It's a hard report."

"Ok...let me know if I can do anything to help."

"Ok Ma, thanks."

He sat down on his bed and, with a sigh, started unbuttoning his shirt. Peeling it off, he started muttering to himself. "Tracy, what's going on? I'm worried..." He tossed his shirt and pants into the hamper and put on his pajamas pants. Digging through his drawers, he struggled to find his shirt.

"Come on!" He said to his drawer. Throwing open his door, he called out to his mother. "Ma! Do you know where my sleep shirt is?" Mrs. Larkin emerged from her room, already in her night dress.

"Oh, Link, it got ripped and needs to be sewed or replaced. Here, use one of your father's extras."

Link took it and pulled it over his head. "Thanks, Ma. Good night."

"Good night, Link. Oh, and honey?"

Link stopped in his doorway and turned to his mother.

"I've been thinking, and... well, that Tracy Turnblad isn't so bad, I

suppose. Just a little... different then who you've been with in the past."

Link sighed. "The only other person was Amber, Ma. Of course she's different. But..." Link thought about Tracy and smiled. "Different is better sometimes, you know?"

"Mmm." Mrs. Larkin nodded with a worried look and returned to her own room. Link watched, then closed his own door and paced some more. Unable to sleep, he snuck downstairs.

Turning on the TV, Link was about to change the channel, but a blurb on the beginning of the ten-o'clock news caught his eye.

"...and, coming up next, a local television personality arrested. We investigate here, on the Baltimore ten-o'clock News." Link took his hand off the dial and sat down, waiting through commercials. The show came back on, and he impatiently listened to the weather, the daily report, and some pish-posh stories. Just about to give up and go to bed at ten thirty, one of the anchors assumed a serious face and spoke into the camera.

"And now, our feature story. Today at about twelve thirty, local TV personality on the Corny Collins Show, Isaac "Seaweed" Stubbs," Seaweed's smiling picture popped up on the screen. Link's jaw hit the floor. "was arrested for malicious assault on one of his co-stars, Joey Fontadore, yesterday afternoon. Stubbs had been hiding and was finally found in a local diner. Co-host to the show and Stubbs mother, "Motormouth" Maybelle Stubbs, had no comment. The family caused quite a commotion two weeks ago at the Miss Teenage Hairspray Pagent, when the suspect's sister, Inez Stubbs, was crowned Miss Teenage Hairspray, and was made the lead dancer, officially intergrating the show. Fontadore is in stable condition. His parents have released the following comment."

An image of Joey's parents, standing outside the hospital, appeared. Link couldn't believe what he was watching. "We don't know why anyone would do this to our son," said Mrs. Fontadore, wiping tears away from her eyes. Mr. Fontadore put his arm around his wife.

"I tell you, that show has just gone downhill. Downhill! Look what's happened! Anyone who gives a hoot about Baltimore and the safety of our children will stop watching and stop their children from watching it! Joey is never going on that show again, and if we have anything to do about it, neither is that black fellow who did this to him!"

The image cut back to the anchor, who shook his head sadly. "We'll keep you updated. And next...Booming suburbs, booming familys. What does this mean for Baltimore?"

Link stared at the TV set, dumbfounded. He turned it off, but didn't go to bed. Instead, he stared into the darkness, thinking. What did this mean for the show? For he and Tracy? After all, Tracy's two best friends were Penny Pingleton and Seaweed Stubbs. Would the show go off the air? Would Tracy forget Link trying to help out Penny and the Stubbs?

Panic filtered through his system. He got signed, sure, but he hadn't heard from the agents since. If that show went off the air, well, he

was in trouble. That was his publicity!

And if Tracy went on another crusade, trying to help out, (Which he knew she would, and he'd support her this time, he wouldn't make the same mistake twice) what would his parents do? His father was rather unpredictable (he seemed to like Tracy), but his mother would be sick in bed with nerves and ban him from seeing her. He couldn't do that. He really like Tracy... maybe even... loved her.

Link took deep breaths, trying to calm down. But he knew he'd never sleep now. And how on earth was he going to concentrate at school tomorrow? Would Tracy be at school tomorrow? Would the show still air?

He stood and paced. His parents were upstairs, asleep, no doubt. Link thought for a moment about sneaking out. But that would do no good right now. Tracy was either at home asleep, or out trying to do something, and either way he sneaking out would do no good. He went to his room and layed down, staring at the ceiling, thinking, planning.

Somehow, he'd lucked out on his parents not watching the news yet. But tomorrow, for sure, they'd see it. He had to do something. Getting up, he shoved an extra pair of pants and shirt into his backpack, just in case. He wasn't sure if he'd need them yet, but he wanted to be prepared.

He lay back down and tossed and turned until he fell asleep at one in the morning from pure exhaustion. Tomorrow is a new day, he thought to himself before nodding off, but it's bringing back yesterday's problems.

6. Detention Contemplation

Link stared at the mirror. He'd slept in, so here he was, fixing his hair in the bathroom mirror. It looked horrible, but for the first time since he'd discovered mirrors, he didn't care. The way he looked was very low on the priority list. The tardy bell for first hour rang.

He walked out of the restroom, and instead of turning left towards class, he turned right, towards detention. There had been a note jammed in his locker.

Meet me in detention -Tracy_

Link almost walked past the detention room. Usually, music filtered through the door, and that was what guided him. But now, the room was silent. He looked through the window to see several students already there, serving detention from yesterday afternoon. Among them were Tracy and Penny, holding hands and whispering.

Link opened the door quietly and tried to slip in unnoticed. He hadn't even bothered to do anything to get a detention slip, so he might be sent back to class. The teacher looked up, but all he did was nod.

The door closed and many people looked around. Tracy was one of them. She dropped Penny's hand and walked over to Link. Falling into his

arms, she let out a sigh.

Generally, they tried to keep the PDA to a minimum, holding hands and maybe a peck on the cheek, but they were both stressed and tired and confused.

"Link," whispered Tracy, sounding exhausted.

"Tracy, Tracy, what happened? I saw the news."

Tracy pushed away from their embrace and grabbed his hands. "Oh, Link, don't you remember? Joey called Li'l Inez scum. He stormed off the set. Remember? Seaweed chased him. They fought, and Seaweed won. That's why we left in a hurry on Saturday. Seaweed was trying to hide from the cops. But they got him."

Link hugged Tracy, a fear in his heart for what was to come. "I know, I remember, I wanted a piece of him myself. Joey, I mean, not Seaweed."

Tracy sighed and they walked over to where Penny sat. Sitting down, Link saw that Penny's eyes were red from crying.

"Mrs. Pingleton's going crazy. Penny told her Seaweed and her were just friends, but she doesn't believe her, not at all. She saw the pagent on TV. We had to sneak Penny out. She's staying with me." explained Tracy, squeezing Penny's hand.

"So, I mean, is the show still airing?" asked Link. Tracy looked at him.

"When I talked to Mr. Collins, it was. Ms. Stubbs is trying to get bail for Seaweed. It's ridiculously high, though."

"Because he's black," said Link.

"Yeah," answered Tracy.

Penny sniffled but just sat quietly. "Anything I can do to help?" asked Link.

Tracy looked at him, suprised. "You sure? You could get in trouble for this."

Link squeezed her hand. "It's what right."

"You mean...your parents?"

"I'm almost an adult. What they don't know won't hurt them...for now."

"Link! Thank you, you don't know how much this means."

Link nodded. "My bet is Ms. Stubbs isn't doing the show today if it airs, and Inez won't be there?"

"Actually, no. They'll both be there. They don't want to affiliate with Seaweed...No, not like that. They don't want to...How do I say it? They don't want to affiliate the show with what happened. Because the show is a big step towards, you know, total intergration."

"But Seaweed's on the show. They've got to know people will associate the two."

"Ms. Stubbs and Mr. Collins are going to act like it didn't happen. They said, it's a private matter of the family, not a show issue. I don't know. Did you hear what the Fontadores said?"

"Yeah,"

Tracy nodded. "That's what makes me nervous."

Link nodded in agreement. They sat in silence, all in their own thoughts. "Tracy, who called you that you knew almost as soon as it happened?" Link asked. The times finally clicked in his head.

"My dad. Penny came and told him, and..." Tracy patted Penny's hand, and didn't finish her sentence. Penny did.

"And Seaweed told me. He came to my house, he said goodbye...kissed me, I didn't understand...He said we had to end our relationship, he was leaving...He told me why..." Tears rolled down her cheeks. Tracy hugged her, and Penny just cried for a moment before they pulled apart.

Time passed, and when Link looked at the clock next, it was almost time for the next class period. He groaned. "I don't want to go."

Tracy shoved her books into her bag. "We have to. If we're counted absent, we can't do the show today. We have to be there."

He sighed. "I know." The bell rang, and Link waited for Tracy. But instead of coming up next to him and taking his hand like she normally did, she took Penny's hand and they walked in front of Link to their next class. He took a deep breath and sat in the desk next to Tracy. Don't look too much into it, he told himself. Penny needs her now more than you do.

But all he could do was hope against hope that his fears weren't being realized.

A/N: Please review and tell me what you think!!!! I love to hear your opinions!!!!

7. Station Confrontation

The bell for the end of ninth period rang. Link grabbed his bag and quickly moved to the hall to meet with Tracy so they could catch the bus to his show. (_I know, earlier he drove, it bothers me too, and i wrote it! How bout we pretend it all matches up anyway? Smiles!)

—

She was in front of Penny's locker, talking to her. He came up and put his arm on Tracy's shoulder and tried for charm.

"Penny, may I steal this lovely lady away?" He smiled. Penny smiled back, but it was a sad smile. Tracy turned and pushed his arm off her shoulder playfully. She offered a dazzling smile that still somehow

made Link's knees weak.

"In just a minute. I'll meet you outside, ok?"

"Ok." Link walked outside and waited outside of the bus for Tracy, feeling a bit glum. People piled onto the bus and offered a hello to him. He nodded and smiled but continued to stare at the door, waiting for Tracy.

Inez came up and stared at him. She waved her hand in front of his face. He blinked and smiled. "Hello."

Inez smiled back. "So how's everyone in La La Land?"

"Oh, no, I'm just waiting for Tracy. She said she'd be out in a minute."

"Ok..." Inez shook her head and laughed at him. She got onto the bus. The bus driver shouted to him.

"You coming?"

"I'm waiting for someone...Tracy's not here yet!" he called back over the turning engine.

The driver looked at the school entrance. "She's got five minutes!"

"She's coming!" Link watched the door.

Sure enough, with two minutes to spare, Tracy came running out the door. She stopped in front of Link. "Sorry," she said through gasps, "Penny started crying again. This whole thing has just got her so upset."

Link nodded and pulled her onto the bus.

"You're late, I leave without you." said the bus driver as a warning.

"Yes, sir," said both Link and Tracy. They made their way to the back of the bus, where the only empty seat was. Link sat next to the window, and Tracy leaned across the aisle to talk to Inez.

Link leaned over to listen, too.

"So anyway, Mama's almost got the bail. After that," Inez shrugged, and Tracy nodded knowingly. Link raised his eyebrows, confused.

Tracy leaned back into their seat, and Link looked at her.

"What comes after that?" he asked.

"Maybe later." She said, raising her eyebrows to indicate the place they were in was a bit too public.

Link nodded, and looked out the window to watch Baltimore stand still as they moved ahead.

Corny was waiting for them. "Alright everyone, gather 'round, gather 'round." The council made a semi-circle around Corny. Link noticed with a smile everyone except Joey and Seaweed was there.

"As you guys probably know, there was some trouble over the weekend. However, that has nothing to do with the show, you hear? What you kids do on your own time does not have anything to do with the show. Also, Joey Fontadore...left...the show before any of this happened. So, lets just dance like we do everyday, and be The Nicest Kids in Town. Alright?" Everyone made agreeing sounds and went to get dressed.

Aside from an awkward pause in the music during roll call, the show went just fine. After the cameras stopped rolling is when it went downhill.

Tracy and Link were just standing around talking. "Inez told me that I should come over to the record shop tonight. She said you should come, too. We can talk there."

Link nodded. "Ok." Finally, a time to really talk to Tracy.

Or so he thought. The doors to the studio flew open, and through them came Mrs. Larkin, chased by Mr. Larkin, grabbing her hand and hissing into her ear, "Brenda! Your ulcers!"

Everyone stared as Mrs. Larkin clutched her purse and cried out, "Link! Link Larkin!" Link looked at Tracy. She offered him a weak smile and a shrug of her shoulders. He walked over to his parents, where Mrs. Larkin grabbed him.

"Oh, thank goodness you're ok! Link, we have to leave now! This show isn't for you anymore!" She looked on the verge of tears.

"Ma," said Link, pulling away, "Stop making a scene!"

"A scene? A scene! Link, you're not dancing on this show again!"

"Ma!"

"Brenda, calm down!"

Mrs. Larkin lowered her voice. "You already got signed! You don't need to dance on this show ever again! Link, my nerves! Did you hear what that... Seawen fellow did?"

"Seaweed, Ma, and yeah, but that doesn't have anything to do with the show."

"He beat up that poor boy!"

"Ma, it's not like that! He just..."

"I'm just sitting, minding my own buisness, and I hear from the TV, 'The Meanest Kids in Town...Whats wrong with the Corny Collins Show?'"

Link could feel the entire council and stage crew watching this exchange. Suddenly, a hand was on his shoulder. He turned to see

Maybelle and Corny behind him, both with charming smiles on their face.

"Well, if it isn't the Larkins. My, I haven't seen you two in quite some time. And how are you today?"

Mr. Larkin smiled and nodded. "Corny. We just came to pick Link up."

"How nice. Well, this gives you a great opportunity to meet our new co-host, Ms. Maybelle Stubbs."

Mabel stuck her hand out. Mr. Larkin shook it and smiled. Mrs. Larkin took it hesitantly. "Mrs. Larkin, you look lovely. I must say, your son is quite the charmer!" Mrs. Larkin smiled.

"Maybelle S-Stubbs, you said?"

"Yes. So glad you came up here." She just nodded.

"W-We have to go now," said Mrs. Larkin, nervously pointing to the door.

"Of course you do, I apologize. You know you two are welcome to the set anytime to watch us film." Mrs. Larkin nodded and grabbed Link's hand.

"Link, lets go." Link nodded.

"Yes, ma'am." He waved goodbye to everyone on the set. Tracy waved goodbye from the back of the set. Behind Link and Mrs. Larkin, Mr. Larkin offered a quick apology and said good-bye to everyone.

In the car on the way home, all Link got to listen to from the back seat was his mother and father saying things like, "Stubbs! That was her! That was his mother!" "Brenda, calm down," "The horrible things that happen on that show! Maybe he shouldn't ever dance again!" "Link hasn't done anything," "Hugh, my nerves! I can't handle this much stress!"

They got home, and Link excused himself to his room. "Link, darling, you don't want dinner?"

"No thank you," he said. He started to walk away, but Mr. Larkin grabbed his arm.

"Link," he said, looking at his wife, who was out of earshot, "Don't listen to your mother. I'll convince her you can still dance. The show is just something we have to move past. For her, huh?" Link offered his father a smile.

"Thanks, Pops." He went to his room without another word. After shutting and locking the door, he sighed. Time to sneak out.

8. Seaweed's Situation

A/N: Quick thanks to Michalea Martin for her correction of my spelling of Maybelle (Mabel). I apologize. Tried to go back and fix them all sorry if i missed one. Also, dear readers, you know I love

you and hate to dissappoint you, but this isn't a hint at Corny/Maybelle relations. In this story, at least, they are simply really good friends and close co-workers. Happy reading anyway!

Link was relieved to see Tracy's house across the street. He couldn't drive, because his parents would have heard the car start, so he had to walk from his neighborhood all the way to Tracy's neighborhood.

He knocked on the door and waited. And waited. He knocked again. Then he noticed a small sign taped to the door.

_Edna's Oxidental Laundry _

Hours: 8-6

Come on in during hours

Link turned the doorknob and it opened. He walked in slowly. "Hello?" he called. He came into the living room, where a basket of laundry sat next to a chair. Through the doorway he could see an ironing board and mounds of laundry. "Hello?"

He felt a little nervous. Was anyone home? "Hello? Mrs. Turnblad? Tracy? Mr. Turnblad?" He turned around and started walking for the door.

He heard door open and close and he heard indistinct talking. "Hello?"

The talking stopped. "Who's there?" asked a cautious voice that sounded like Edna's.

"Link Larkin? I knocked, but no one answered, and the sign sa-"

"Link?" Edna and Tracy walked into the room, looking confused.

"Sorry, the sign said...I was just leaving...I realized no one was home..."

"No, it's ok. We just weren't expecting you."

"I-I'm here to see Tracy."

Tracy came out from around her mother. "Me?"

"Yeah." He put his hands in his pockets and let out a deep breath. "Yeah."

Edna moved to the kitchen, where she could tactfully listen but not be seen.

"Sit down," said Tracy, motioning to the furniture. They sat next to each other on the couch.

"I figured I wouldn't see you until graduation, the way your parents were talking."

"I snuck out," he said with a smile.

"Oh," she smiled back and let out a little laugh. "So why sneak out to here?"

"Well, you said we were going to the record shop tonight. It sounded important. I didn't want to miss it."

"Oh, ok. I was about to go over there, actually."

"Over where?" Edna appeared in the doorway, hands on hips.

"To the record shop?" said Tracy with a smile.

"Why and why didn't you tell me before?"

"Inez invited us over for dinner at the show. I came to pick Tracy up." offered Link with his most charming smile. Edna raised an eyebrow at them.

"Please, Ma?" Edna sighed.

"I know I can't stop you. Be careful. And don't be late! Go tell your father where you're going, too."

Tracy jumped up and hugged her mother. "Thanks, Ma!" Link stood up and nodded at Edna. She stared at him.

Edna wasn't 100 percent won over by Link yet.

She smiled. Maybe 87 percent.

Tracy grabbed Link by the hand and they left. She looked around. "Didn't drive?"

"Ma and Pops would have heard the car." he said with an apologetic smile.

"We'll walk, no big deal. Hold on, we have to tell Daddy where we're going." They entered the joke shop and Wilbur appeared from around a corner.

"Hi, Daddy. Ma wanted me to tell you that we're going to dinner at Motormouth's Records."

"Where?"

"Motormouth's Records? Motormouth Maybelle? She co-hosts the show?"

Wilbur looked confused.

"Ma said we could go."

"Ok. He's taking you?" Wilbur shot a glance at Link, who smiled nervously. Wilbur had seemed to like him last time they met. What could have changed?

"Yeah."

He smiled. "Good." Tracy kissed him on the cheek and they left.

"Do you know how far away the shop is?" asked Link as they walked hand in hand.

"Not far. A couple blocks." said Tracy. The streets were empty, as it was getting close to dinner time, and Link felt it was safe enough.

"So, Tracy, can we talk here?" Tracy looked around, then at him.

"I'd rather we just wait until we know we're alone." Link nodded.

"Ok."

After a bit, the record shop came into view. Tracy broke away from Link and knocked on the door. He stood behind her.

There was a couple seconds of nothing, then the door opened. "Tracy!" said Maybelle with a big smile.

"Hello, Ms. Stubbs." Maybelle motioned for them to enter. As Link slid by her she laughed.

"And I see you brought Link. Didn't think you were going to get to leave your room until next year."

Link just smiled sheepishly. It was one thing to tell your girlfriend you snuck out, but another adult? No way. Maybelle just smiled in a knowing way.

Maybelle ushered Link and Tracy into the apartment behind the store, where Inez sat with her hands beneath the table. Tracy cleared her throat.

"Link said he'd help us."

Maybelle raised an eyebrow. "So he knows?"

"Not everything, but yeah, he knows."

Maybelle thought for a moment, then nodded at Inez, who pulled money up from her lap and started counting it. Maybelle turned and smiled.

"So nice of you to come over for dinner. It's almost done, and we're expecting a few more guests. Have a seat until then. Anything to drink?" Tracy requested water and so did Link as they sat across from Inez, who sat the money down and smiled.

"Sorry I didn't say hi a minute ago. Had a number in my head, I was in the middle of counting, see, and I didn't want to lose it."

Maybelle sat the drinks in front of Tracy and Link and looked at Inez. "And?" Inez nodded excitedly.

Tracy smiled and Link realized that it was Seaweed's bail money she

had been counting. A smile spread across his lips. Maybelle was about to speak when a knock at the door made all four of them jump. Inez jumped up ran into the shop. Moving the blinds and inch, she called out, "It's just Corny Collins, Ma!" Maybelle nodded and Tracy and Link heard the door open and close.

Corny entered, a large trench coat on. He noticed Link and Tracy and looked at Maybelle, who nodded. Only then did he remove his coat and smile. "Link, Tracy."

Tracy smiled back. "Hello, Mr. Collins." Link nodded a greeting. Corny turned his back to them and spoke to Maybelle quietly for a moment. Inez sat back down, and Tracy grabbed Link's hand. He turned and looked at her. She mouthed to him,

We'll talk during dinner.

Link nodded an ok as Corny turned back around. Maybelle sat the roast on the buffet. "Dinner's served!" Corny served himself first, and then Inez, then Tracy, and then Link, who, remembering how good Maybelle's cooking was, got just a bit extra. Inez walked out of the kitchen, and so did Tracy. Feeling a bit lost, Link followed.

Inez sat down at a card table set up in the store. Tracy sat too, and smiled at Link. Inez explained.

"Mama needed to talk to Corny alone. She told me earlier."

Link sat down, too. Tracy smiled and took Inez's hand. "Inez, ignore what we say. I haven't got a chance to talk to Link alone for a while, so we're siezing the opportunity."

Inez just smiled and shrugged. Tracy turned to Link and sighed.

"It feels like we haven't talked in forever!"

Link smiled. "I know."

"Where to begin? First off, did your parents like me? Lunch seemed...less than comfortable on Saturday."

Link searched for words. "Well, I think you caught them off guard. You're on a different end of the spectrem than Amber was, that's for sure." He smiled with pride. "But you were great."

Tracy smiled. "Good, they made me nervous. I felt horrible about leaving early, but Penny needed me. Then we had to try and hunt down Seaweed, but we came here and talked to Ms. Stubbs, and she didn't know where he was either, and it got late, and then the next day he showed up here, and we had to run here, and he left before we got here, and then he got arrested," Tracy paused for breath.

"Trace, I understand."

"I would have rather it not happened and spent all weekend with you," she said with a smile.

He took her hands in his and smiled back stupidly. "That would have been nice." He would have loved to kiss her, but Inez was there and the timing was bad.

Tracy blinked and cleared her throat. She squeezed his hands. "Um, anyway, about this. The Stubbs have family in...Chicago, right?" She turned to Inez, who had just crammed her mouth with roast. Eyes widening, she nodded and tried to swallow the huge bite.

Tracy and Link chuckled at the sight, and Inez coughed after swallowing. She smiled and laughed. "Uh, yeah. Mom has cousins of cousins, or something." Link thought for a moment as Inez guzzled water.

"Wait, Chicago, as in Chicago, _Illinois_?"

Tracy nodded. "Yeah."

"How are they going to help?"

Inez's eyebrows lifted. Tracy spoke. "After they bail Seaweed out, he's going there. He can't stay here in Baltimore. Not after this."

"He doesn't have to, like, serve any time?"

"Um, no. Not anymore." said Inez. "Bail, and he's free."

"So the Fontadore's aren't pressing any charges?"

"He's not waiting around to find out."

Link nodded with understanding. So it was like that.

Suddenly, Tracy frowned. "Hey, Inez, I thought Penny came here after school. Where is she?"

Inez smiled as Link took advantage of their talking and stuffed his face with the delicious food. "She's asleep in the living room. That's why we're out here."

Dinner continued and the three made small talk. After the plates were empty they stayed, not wanting to interrupt Corny and Maybelle. After a bit, Maybelle reappeared. "Y'all want to come into the kitchen?" They all grabbed their plates and followed her into the kitchen. Penny sat at the table, eating.

The table had four chairs. Maybelle sat down, and Inez next to her. Tracy and Link stood awkwardly inbetween Corny and Penny, so that they weren't standing behind anyone.

Maybelle cleared her throat. "Alright, let's figure this out."

9. Sad Salutations

A/N: I need to shut up, I know, but thought you should know-there is more Penny in this chapter than in the previous chapters...Does it bother anyone else that in the 2007 movie there's not much Penny to base Penny off of? Maybe it's just me, I've never seen the original... had a chance to watch it but passed it up to see the new one again-still not sure i regret it...anyway sorry if you think she's at all out of character, i tried...also thanks to

oldiesbutgoodies for telling me how to spell Tussle, oh yeah, and just to clear up Edna and Wilbur don't have any probs with Link, i was just trying to highlight that it was a real relationship, and Tracy is their only child, and Link did ditch her at first so they might be a bit hesitant but they do like him!...anyway, I know _I_ hate rambling authors notes so-bye bye!

"We got the bail money. It wasn't easy, but we got it." Link, Tracy, and Inez didn't know it, but Maybelle had hocked many of her personal possessions, including her former mother-in-law's jewlrey, something she'd promised herself she'd never do. "So now it's just a matter of getting Seaweed here, and then to Chicago."

Corny cleared his throat. "I'm going to go bail him out and bring him here, right?"

Maybelle nodded and patted Penny's hand. She had tears in her eyes. "He's gonna pack some stuff, leave the note, and then head out to Chicago. Link, you can drive?"

Heat flushed his cheeks. "Uh, yeah, but I walked tonight." Maybelle raised an eyebrow, and Corny looked at him, skeptically smiling.

"Right. This might have been easier had you not snuck out, but we'll manage." Maybelle had a twinkle in her eye, and the heat came back to Link's cheeks. A giggle escaped from Inez (who clamped a hand over her mouth), and Tracy (who blushed and squeezed Link's hand).

Corny looked at his watch. "Maybelle, I've got to go get him now." Maybelle nodded and Corny headed for the door as he shrugged the coat back over his shoulders. Maybelle looked at Tracy and Link and moved her head towards the living room. Tracy nodded and pulled Link behind her into the living room with Maybelle, who excused them.

"We'll be right back, ok?" Inez and Penny nodded.

Maybelle closed the door behind them and took a seat across from the couch they sat on.

"After Seaweed gets here, I need you two to, well, pretty much make Penny leave. The girl is sweet, yes, I know my son loves her, but Seaweed'll never leave if she's here. Let them say goodbye and then usher her out. We have things to do." Link and Tracy, wide eyed at Maybelle's serious and slightly threatning tone. They nodded in agreement. "Good."

With a smile, she opened the door. Penny was putting her plate in the sink and smiling as Inez laughed. Maybelle smiled.

"Oh, Penny, good, you're done. Inez, help me clean up, ok?"

"Ok." Tracy and Link joined Penny at the kitchen table, and they talked while Maybelle and Inez washed dishes. The thought of seeing Seaweed soon seemed to cheer up Penny, who talked and even offered a smile, more than she had been doing lately.

After the dishes were done, Maybelle sent Inez to fold up the table in the front of the shop. She was in there all of three minutes before a squeal made them all jump. Maybelle threw open the door, and

Tracy, Link, and Penny ran behind her to see what was going on.

Corny was closing the door behind him. Seaweed twirled Inez and then sat her down. He looked at his mother next. She pulled him into a hug and said, "Oh, Seaweed, I'm so glad you're ok," then pushed him back and smacked the back of his head. "Why'd you go and get arrested?"

Seaweed rubbed the back of his head. "Ow, Mama, I'm sorry, I just..." but he trailed off when he saw Penny. They fell into each other's arms, and tears were shed. They stayed in that embrace for several moments, before pulling apart enough to kiss.

Link put his arms around Tracy and felt jealous. Even though their relationship was much more taboo, Penny and Seaweed showed affection much more freely in public. He'd seen them kiss numerous times, yet he and Tracy hadn't done much but hold hands and the occasional kiss on the cheek since their first kiss.

Taking her hand in his, Seaweed led them into the living room, where he and Penny sat right next to each other. Everyone else started to follow, but Corny motioned them into the shop for a moment.

"The police weren't pleased we got enough to bail him out. So tonight would be preferable." He said with a serious look.

Maybelle nodded and looked at Tracy, who cleared her throat. "We'll go get her." She and Link walked through the kitchen and started to go into the living room, but both stopped before the door and looked at each other.

Link knew if he could never see Tracy again, he would want more than just a few minutes to say goodbye. He could see Tracy agreed. No matter what the adults said, they didn't understand young love.

Life without love was hardly life at all. They slowly entered the living room and saw Seaweed with his forehead pressed against Penny's as they whispered to each other. He wiped a tear off her cheek. Seaweed saw them first and stood up and hugged Tracy briefly. "Hey, Trace." He smiled at Link, who smiled back. He sat back down next to Penny.

Tracy spoke. "We know how unfair this is, but, Seaweed, you've got a long night ahead of you, so..." She looked at Link, who smiled encouragingly. "Penny, we need... we need to leave soon."

Both looked surprised. Seaweed looked at Penny, then back at Tracy. "Yeah. Give us a minute?"

They nodded and stepped into the kitchen. Maybelle and Corny sat at the table with Inez. Link explained. "They're saying good bye."

After a minute or two, Seaweed and Penny walked in hand in hand. He kissed her tenderly and wrapped his arms around her. "I'll see you soon, ok?" Penny nodded and didn't let go. "Penny, darlin', I love you."

She opened her mouth and a whimper came out, followed by "I love you,

too." Tracy took Penny's hand and gently pulled her towards the door. She held onto Seaweed's hand until their arms didn't reach anymore.

Tracy led Penny to the door. Link said goodbye to Corny, Maybelle, and Inez, and shook Seaweed's hand. "Good luck, man."

"Thanks, Link. You know, you ain't so bad. And you're pretty lucky. Tracy is... one of a kind. Don't forget it."

Link had always been the shallow pretty-boy of the show. He looked good, acted smooth, a real ladies man. And he still was, on some level. But looking into Seaweed's eyes, which were glistening with tears, he felt a lump in his throat. He nodded and managed a simple "Yeah, I know." Waving again to everyone else, he left to catch up with Tracy, who leaned in and whispered into his ear.

"I want to say good-bye, too. Wait here with Penny." He nodded and stood with Penny outside on the darkening streets. She didn't say anything, tears just silently rolling down her cheeks. Tracy reappeared, wiping a tear away. She smiled at Link. He wanted to hug her, to kiss her, to thank God he had her, but he couldn't do it now. Not in front of Penny. It would be salt in the wound.

"Ready?" she asked. They all started walking, and this time, Tracy walked inbetween Link and Penny. She felt it too... that 'Thank God it's not us' feeling Link had.

After dropping off Tracy and Penny at the Turnblad's house, Link hurried to his house and went to sneak into his room. It was almost nine. With any luck, he'd be there when his mother came to say good night.

10. Mr Larkin's Frustration

Link crawled back through his window and carefully pushed it back down so that it didn't make a thud. The lock had been broken since last summer, so the window looked locked even when it wasn't. He hadn't planned it, but for the (now) grand total of three times he'd snuck out, it had helped.

He dusted his slacks off and yawned. The entire day had been long, long, long. He wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed, pull the covers up, and drift into a deep sleep. He'd wash his hair in the morning, he had to wet it down every morning anyway.

Unfortunately, when he sat on the edge of his bed, he sat on his mended pajama shirt. Which had not been on his bed when he had left. Which meant someone had been in his room.

Throwing the shirt down, he muttered curses to himself and ran his hand across his hair (too much hairspray to run his hand through his hair). Quietly, he snuck downstairs and peeked around a corner to see his parents watching the news, looking totally oblivious to any happenings.

Link wanted to breathe a sigh of relief, but somehow he couldn't. How had the shirt ended up on his bed if not by a parent? He felt the beginnings of something bad. Instead of freaking out, he calmed

himself down and tried to figure out what to do. He decided to just go to his room, lay down, and leave his bedroom door open so that when his parents walked by, they would see him.

Which was sooner than he thought. Pulling down the covers on his bed to lay down, he heard his mother from the hallway.

"Good night, Link." He turned.

"Oh, hey. G'night, Ma." Link returned his attention to his bed. She paused in the doorway.

"Dear?"

"Yeah, Ma?" He turned again to look at her, trying to look nonchalant. She offered a weak smile.

"I'm sorry if I embarrassed you today. I worry, you know."

"Oh, it's ok, Ma. Night."

"Good night." She walked past his room and after a moment, his father followed.

"Night, Pops."

He stopped in the doorway and turned. Putting his hands in his pockets, he raised his eyebrows. "Oh, son, you're back. Have fun where ever you went?" His voice hinted at danger, and Link felt his heart sink. He didn't say anything, just sat on the bed. His father walked right up to Link. "Stand up."

Link stood up, looked into his father's eyes. Mr. Larkin spoke in a hushed, angry tone. "I am not yelling for one simple reason. Your mother would hear me, and I don't want her to worry any more than she already does. I consider myself nice. I tried to help you. Convinced your mother to let you dance. But you choose to thank me by sneaking out? I _will not _be disrespected!"

Mr. Larkin took a quick breath. Link looked down, then back into his father's eyes. He knew Mr. Larkin hated it when Link looked away. "So this is what is going to happen. I am not going to tell your mother. Niether are you. Where did you go tonight?" Link thought for a moment.

"Uh, T-Tracy's."

"You will go to school tomorrow. You will come _straight home._ You will not go to the show. You will not see Tracy again. Let me be extra clear. _You_ _will not see Tracy again._ This will last as long as you live under my roof. Are we clear?"

Rip... Link could swear he could hear his heart getting ripped from his chest. Never see Tracy again? No!

He nodded silently. Mr. Larkin nodded. "Good. You got mail." Mr. Larkin shoved a letter against Link's chest, and stared into his son's eyes, brows furrowed with anger. Link took it and watched his father leave. Sitting on his bed, he looked at the envelope. It was addressed to him, alright. He ripped it open, noticing the return

address was in West Virginia. Who did he know in West Virginia?

Link,

I must begin by saying that the way you broke up with me was very rude. On live TV! For her!

Oh. Amber.

_Anyway, Link, I forgive you. I know you didn't mean anything by it. Well, Mother and I have moved here to South Carolina. We are staying with Mother's parents until we find a place of our own. I realized I forgot to return your ring. So here it is. _

Amber Von Tussle

P.S. Say hello to Jonathon Russels for me, will you? I met him at the pagent.

Link looked at Amber's swirly handwriting and shook his head. Only she could chide him for breaking up with her and ask him to send greeting to her last fling in the same letter.

He tipped the envelope upside down and the heavy class ring fell into his palm. He closed his fingers around the cold metal and lay back on his bed. He held it up and inspected it.

Slipping it onto his finger, he closed his eyes. He had an idea.

11. Fighting Seperation

Link walked down the halls of school, smiling and greeting people as he passed them. He told himself over and over, _You are Link Larkin. Link Larkin. Teenage hearthrob. Local TV star. Grounded for the remainder of your teenage years...No, no, concentrate! You are Link Larkin. Link Larkin. Teenage hearthrob. Former local TV star..._

He rounded the corner into the hall where Tracy's locker was. She wasn't there. He stopped at his locker and opened, grabbing his first hour textbook and shoving it in his backpack. He looked for a note from Tracy. Nothing. He passed the detention room, their first hour class, her locker, she wasn't anywhere.

Finally, she appeared. "Hi, Link. Sorry I'm late, Penny slept in and I had to wait for her." She smiled at him. He smiled back and led her away from the group he was talking too when arrived.

"Hey, Trace."

Her smile faded away. "You ok?"

He shook his head. How did he tell her? "My Pops caught me last night. I'm grounded until I'm old enough to move out."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she offered an apologetic smile and took his hand. Her skin was so soft.

"Nah, it's not your fault. But... I'm not allowed to be on the show anymore."

Her face fell in disbelief. "What?" She was still beautiful. He had his choice of any girl in school, but he definately had the best one now.

"And he said...he said I'm not allowed to see you again." Link felt a lump in his throat. She started to say something but didn't. Instead, she looked down, taking in the information.

"Oh."

Link jumped in, grabbing her other hand. He spoke quickly. "But, babe, it's not going to stop me. They don't know anything. We can stick it out. He can't control me at school."

She looked at him and smiled weakly. "Uh huh." There was only a week left of school. After that was the long, endless summer. And then senior year.

"And...and I can sneak out again to see you. I'm almost an adult now, he can't control me."

"Yeah."

"We're going to stay together, I promise. And to prove it to you..." He pulled his hands away, slipped off his ring and held it up. "I...I want you to wear my ring."

Tracy's face lit up in happy disbelief. "Oh my God, Link, really?" She put her hands over her mouth. He smiled and pulled one of them down and slipped the ring onto her finger.

"Really." Tracy looked at the ring, eyes shining. It fit perfectly, like it had been fit for her, not him. Amber had complained how big his ring was, how it didn't fit her tiny fingers, only her thumb. All he'd heard was gripe, gripe, gripe. But not this time. The ring slipped on easily.

It was meant to be, that Tracy wear his ring. They were supposed to be together, this proved it. He took her hands and looked down into her amazing brown eyes. "Tracy, I love you. I'm right here. We don't have to do what Penny and Seaweed did. I'm not leaving. You're my girl, right?"

She nodded, eyes glistening. "Right."

"Good." He kissed her, right there, in school, on the lips. He didn't care, it needed to be done. Nuts to the people watching and staring. Tracy was his girl, and he wanted to kiss her. So he did, just that simple. Tracy kissed him back for a moment and then pulled apart.

"Oh, Link, I love you too. Thank you." Fingers intertwined, they walked down the hallway. As usual, some girls looked at Link with gaga eyes and others at Tracy with jealousy. But today, the pair didn't see anyone but each other.

The world was a happy little bubble, that only they lived in.

Outside, in reality, it was raining pins and needles that would pop their bubble, but for now, at least, they could be happy.

****Short, I know, so I'll try to hurry up with the next chapter. The ideas are flowing fast right now... the end is in sight!****

12. Larkin Confrontation

Link tapped his notebook with his pen. Finally, the bell rang. He jumped up and ran into the hallway to see Tracy off before she went to the show. He was going home. She was at her locker, telling Penny something with a smile on her face. Coming up behind her, he put his arm around her shoulders. She turned and offered her beautiful smile. Already, he'd heard whispers, especially from Amber's former followers.

_He gave her his ring? _

_Why? _

_I didn't think they'd last a week. _

Well, they've only been going out, like, three or four!

_She has to be bribing him or something, if you know what I mean.

_

Boys like Link Larkin do not date girls like Tracy Turnblad. Something is seriously wrong with that.

Whatever happened to Amber, anyway?

It's kind of sweet in a wierd way.

I'm suprisied it even fits her.

He'd simply let the comments roll off his back. He was so over high school, the rumors, the snide remarks, the judgments. He couldn't wait until blissful graduation next year when they could simply be together, and that was that.

Duh. He knew that would never happen. The real world was just like high school, minus a gym and lockers. They would never escape the stares.

"I really wish you could come, Link. But don't get in any more trouble than you're already in."

"I won't. I'm going to try to talk to my pops tonight."

She nodded and sighed. "Well, I better go. I'll tell Mr. Collins and Ms. Stubbs where you are."

He smiled sadly. "Thanks, babe. I'll try to call you tonight."

They squeezed each other's hand and parted ways.

Link walked down the street, hands in pocket, and watched the bus chug away in the opposite direction. Anger against his parents

bubbled in the depth of his gut, but it didn't rise into anything. He felt suprisingly calm about the entire situation. After all, it was just natural that he and Tracy be together, and dance together. This was an entirely temporary thing, it couldn't last, that wasn't how life worked.

He opened the front door to his house and called out to his mother. "Ma, I'm home!"

He walked into the living room, where she sat, reading. "Already? I didn't realize school got out so soon, dear."

He kept his voice neutral. "It doesn't. The council kids don't have last period. I left an hour early, because I'd be at the station now."

She chewed her lower lip and sat her newspaper down. "Oh. Ok." She stood. "I'm going to go into the kitchen now, alright?"

He nodded and sat down on the couch. Flipping through the newspaper, he tried to kill time, checking the clock until finally it said four thirty. He turned the TV on. the familiar _oohs_ from the council kids filled his ears.

"Link! Come help me!" His mother called from the kitchen. Link flicked the TV off, not even getting to see the council. Never really having actually seen the show, he had been a bit curious. When they still had Negro Day off, Amber had not let him watch it.

His mother stood at the counter. "Lucinda went home sick at lunch. I was going to make dinner, but I can't reach the flour. Can you get it for me?" She pointed to a top shelf. Link sighed.

"Yeah." pulling a chair against the counter, Link reached and grabbed the flour. There had to be more accesible flour somewhere in the kitchen, but he knew. It wasn't about the flour. It was about her not wanting him to watch the show. "I'm going up to my room. Call me if you need anything else."

"Ok, dear." He thunked up the stairs and entered his room. There he stayed until his mother called him down for dinner.

His father was sitting at the table. The two did not make eye contact. Mrs. Larkin seemed oblivious to the tension. They sat in silence, each poking their food in their own worlds. Mrs. Larkin was not the best cook.

When dinner was done, Mrs. Larkin excused herself to the kitchen, and Mr. Larkin spoke.

"Link?"

"Yes?"

"Where is your class ring?"

"What?" Link looked at his hands.

"Your class ring? You were wearing it this morning?"

Link cleared his throat nervously. He could see anger in his father's eyes. But could he blame him? Mr. Larkin loathed nothing more than being disrespected. And Link had promised last year when he'd been caught sneaking out to see Amber that he wouldn't do it again. Mr. Larkin was one to hold a grudge.

"Um, it's in my room." He hoped his father would buy it.

No dice. "Go get it, please."

"I don't remember where I sat it." Link looked at his father and knew he knew.

"Link, don't test me."

He sighed and sat up a bit. "The only reason I disobeyed you is because I had to!"

"Had to? I'm pretty sure you had a choice."

"No, Pops, I didn't! I love Tracy. You said I couldn't see her again while I lived here. I had to promise her we'd stay together through it. We're going to be together in the end."

"Link Andrew Larkin! Do not test me!"

"I'm not trying to!" They were shouting now, both had stood up. Mrs. Larkin opened the kitchen door, but said nothing, just stood watching, her expression more nervous than usual.

"I am your father! You can't just disrespect me!"

"But you don't know! You don't understand! You think the show is horrible, Tracy is the cause of the problems, but it's just not true!"

"Have you seen the news? I don't think you realize the extent of what's happening!"

"What do you think is happening, Pops? Because I know! I know what's going on! I was there when it happened!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I know! I know what happened with Tracy and the march! She told me! I was the one that talked to her! She didn't do anything to that cop! They only wanted to arrest her because she was trying to help get blacks on TV! And they didn't want it to happen!"

"Link..."

"I was there at the station when Joey insulted Li'l Inez! I was there! I know why Seaweed did what he did! I would have done it, too! Do you even know what Joey said? He called Inez scum! He called the new council kids disgusting! He called Tracy a whale! He said they have no business being on TV! He's sick! He deserves what he got!"

"Link," Mr. Larkin looked confused. But Link wasn't done. He was on a roll.

"You just don't understand! You don't get it! But I do! I know! Seaweed's not bad! It was Joey! But you know what? It doesn't matter! Because Seaweed is gone! He left! Because no one here understands! No one in Baltimore understands!"

"Link!" Mr. Larkin looked mad now. Mrs. Larkin was chewing on her fingernails.

"No!" Link slammed the table, frustration filling him. "I'm done! Ok? I'm done!" Link left. His father didn't yell after him. His mother didn't chase him. They let him go.

Out on the darkening streets of Baltimore, alone, Link took a cleansing breath. He looked back at his house. Without a second thought, he started walking towards where he knew he wanted to be.

13. Link's Safe Haven

Link stood in front of Tracy's door and took a deep breath. He read the 'Edna Oxidentil Laundry' sign and knocked. He could hear a loud thud, someone walking, and then the door opened. Edna looked at him, confused.

"Link?"

"Mrs. Turnblad, hi."

"Are- are you ok?"

"Yeah, I just thought I'd-" He was interrupted by Wilbur calling from inside

"Edna, who is it?"

"It's Link." she called back, still looking confused. The floors creaked, and an equally confused looking Tracy came up behind her mother.

"Hi, Tracy" said Link, with a little wave of his hand.

"Hello, Link." She smiled at him.

He cleared his throat and put his hands in his pockets. "I just thought I'd walk over here and visit. If you're busy, I can leave."

"No, it's alright. Come on in." Edna pushed herself against the wall so that Link could slide by. He smiled and followed Tracy into the living room.

"Hello, Penny, Mr. Turnblad." Penny, on the couch, and Mr. Larkin, in a chair, returned his greeting.

"Link thought he'd come visit for a spell." explained Edna, taking a seat in another chair next to Wilbur's. They both nodded and smiled. Tracy sat next to Penny on the couch, and Link next to her.

"We just ate dinner, Link, are you..."

"Oh, I already ate, before I came, but thank you."

"Well, we weren't doing anything special, just going to watch the news..." she said, looking at the TV. Link smiled.

"Sounds good."

It was a bit awkward at first, but soon, they settled back down. Everyone started talking. Wilbur asked Penny something, and why she answered, Tracy turned to Link. Her hand slipped into his. She spoke quietly.

"Why the visit?"

He tried for charm. Smiling, he said, "What, I can't just come visit my girl?"

"Not when your parents put me on the no-no list." she answered with raised eyebrows.

He sighed. "Well... I didn't sneak out, if that's what you mean."

"I kind of figured that out. You look stressed."

"I...I got in a fight with my pops and stormed out. This was the only place I could think of to come to."

She looked down for a moment, then back into his eyes. "Oh, Link, I'm sorry. Is...is this because of me?"

"No! No, it was about...everything. I need to make it right, I know. But I need to calm down first. So I decided to come see you." He smiled at her. She smiled back.

The evening passed pleasantly, and all too soon Link said good night and headed home. The entire way, he spoke to the night, practicing what he'd say to his parents. When he got to his house, he looked at the lit up windows and took a deep breath.

He opened the door and quietly slipped into the living room. His parents turned around from where they were sitting. Mrs. Larkin jumped up and hugged him. "Link! Thank God you're ok, we had no idea where you were..." They pulled apart and she looked at her husband. Taking a deep breath, she left the room, leaving Link and his father alone.

"Link, I..."

"Pops, me first. I'm... I'm not sorry for anything I said. I was right. I know that. But I'm still your son. If I have to leave, well, I will. I would like to still be your son, though. Because...you're my family." Link paused and thought about Mrs. Pingleton, who called Penny a devil child, which he knew hurt Penny. He thought about Maybelle Stubbs, who had just nearly broke the law to help her son.

He thought about Edna and Wilbur, who had encouraged her daughter to shoot for the stars, had supported her and trusted her even when they didn't think she was doing the right thing. He thought about Tracy

and Penny, how Tracy had opened her home to Penny, had supported her through anything.

He even thought about Velma Von Tussle, who, though her methods may not have been the best, had still done anything for the better of her child. "And family is the most important thing you can have."

Mr. Larkin smiled. "We probably won't ever see eye to eye on some things, Link. But I never want you to run away again. Or feel the need too, anyway. I was as nervous as your mother."

Link and his father shook hands.

****Worry not, dear readers, there's still one chapter left!****

14. A Simple Resolution

****Two weeks later****

Link looked in the mirror. One extra spray, just to be sure. Not that he was doing his hair for any particular reason. No one but his mother and father would see him today...

Or tomorrow...

Or the next day...

Or the next...

After plastering down any unruly hairs with his faithful Ultra Clutch, he flipped the bottle, caught it, winked at his reflection, and sat the bottle on the counter. Whistling, he walked downstairs. Today was a good day, despite the monotony of constant punishment.

He sat down for breakfast, but only his mother joined him. She smiled an apologetic smile.

"Your father had to go to work today."

"On a Saturday morning?"

"Yes, dear, Saturday's are banking days, too."

"He usually goes in in the afternoon, that's all."

"He told me he had to go in,"

"Oh. Ok." They ate in silence. Afterwards, they both went to the living room. Dividing the newspaper, they sat in silence and read. A day alone with his mother was not exactly thrilling. Link tapped his foot on the carpet. As usual, music was playing in his head.

Just as the song in his head hit a strong drum beat, someone knocked on their door. Link didn't realize it until his mother's head snapped up. Her eyebrows furrowed. "Who could that be?"

Link looked up. "Huh?" Whoever it was knocked again. "Oh. I'll get it." Link jumped up and went to the hall. He opened the door to see

an excited looking Tracy.

"Tracy?"

"Link! I know I'm not supposed to be here, but she did it! I had to come tell you! She actually did it!"

He frowned at her, confused. "What?"

"Penny! She did it!" Tracy bounced with energy. Link stepped outside and closed the door behind him. Laughing and grabbing her hands, he nodded his head.

"Okay. okay, calm down a minute! Now, tell me, slowly, what's going on."

Tracy had an ear-to-ear smile on her face. She pulled a folded up piece of paper and put it in his hands. "Here. You read it."

Link smiled at her and unfolded the paper. It was a letter. Feeling a bit confused, he read it.

Tracy-

I thought you should know first. I did it. Mom and I made up, and at bedtime I went to my room, packed what I needed, and left. I left her a note, so she already knows, but she'll probably come to your house yelling, so I apologize for that in advance. I know the plan was for me to finish my senior year here in Baltimore, but I just can't do it. Thank you for being such a supportive friend, I'll make sure to mail you again when I get settled. Please tell your parents thank you for me, too, for letting me stay with you. I don't know where I would have gone. Tell Inez and Ms. Stubbs goodbye for me while you're at it. You are amazing, and I know Link and you will be happy together. But it's time for me to go find my black white knight.

Penny

Link held the letter up. "Really?"

Tracy laughed. "Really! She did it! She went to Chicago!" Link laughed.

The front door opened. Mrs. Larkin stood in the doorway, looking at Tracy and Link, confused. "Oh, Mrs. Larkin, I'm sorry, I know I'm not supposed to be here or anything, but something huge happened and Link had to know."

"Oh, well, ok." said Mrs. Larkin, looking inbetween the two. After a long talk, the Larkins had allowed Link to go back on the show, and see Tracy again, but only after three weeks of strict lock-down. After that, he was free to do whatever again.

Link and Tracy had decided three weeks wasn't all that bad. They could go that long without seeing each other, easy.

Two weeks later, they had broken the rule easily twelve times by calling each other, or Tracy coming over. Each time they had spoken briefly until one of the Larkins gave Link a 'You-Know-Better' look,

and they had said goodbyes.

Link was getting that look now.

"We're saying goodbye, I promise."

"Mmm, ok, hurry up." she said, leaving the door open and retreating inside. Mrs. Larkin never had been good at punishment.

"I gotta go," said Link pointing inside.

"Yeah, ok. Sorry." They kissed briefly. "See you next week."

"Yeah. I'll be free then." He said, smiling slyly and winking at her. Tracy laughed, walked down the street, and turned and waved.

He waved back and waited until she had turned the corner at the end of his street before going inside. Nodding his head to the song still playing inside his head, he smiled. He was just following the beat.

Life had it's difficulties, sure, but if you followed the beat, you couldn't go wrong. Especially when you had people like Tracy at your side. He had no worries. Not anymore.

****Ta da!!!!!!!!!!!! th-th-th-that's all, folks! So??? What'd you think? Tell me, because I'm not that good at writing endings, and this is my first real fanfic, so any tips could help. Also, I'm considering writing some branch-offs of this story, showing it from some different peoples POV's... Seaweed or Penny, Tracy, maybe even... ooh... Amber? If I wrote it, would you read it? Well, let me know! Until next time... Happy Reading!****

End
file.